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G O D 's Goodness, and M A N 's
Ingratitude, consider'd,

I N A

S E R M O N

P R E A C H 'D at the

Parish-Church of ALL-SANNTS,

N O R T H A M P T O N.

On *February* 11, 1757.

ing the Day appointed by H I S M A J E S T Y 's
P R O C L A M A T I O N for a

P U B L I C K F A S E.

By T. RICHARDS,
Curate of the said Parish.

*seek ye the Lord while he may be found: Call ye upon
him while he is near.*

ISAIAH lvii. 6.

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1917

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ISAIAH V. 4.

What could have been done more to my Vineyard, that I have not done in it? Wherefore when I looked that it should bring forth Grapes, brought it forth wild Grapes?

IN the Beginning of this Prophetical Book we have a most melancholy Account of the wretched Degeneracy of the Jewish Nation, and of the grievous Corruptions which almost universally prevail'd amongst them: * *Ab sinful Nation, a People laden with Iniquity, a Seed of evil Doers, Children that are Corrupters, they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto Anger, they are gone away backward,* is the mournful Description the Prophet gives us of that People. They had been visited with the Divine Judgments for their Sins: *Their Country was desolate, their Cities burnt with Fire: Their Land, Strangers devour'd it in their Presence, and it was desolate, as overthrown by Strangers:* Yet they continu'd unreform'd, and did not repent of their Wickedness, tho' they so severely
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smarted for it. *Why should ye be stricken any more? Ye will revolt more and more.* The Number of good People among them was very small. *The Daughter of Zion was left as a Cottage in a Vineyard, as a Lodge in a Garden of Cucumbers, as a besieged City.* The Generality of them were grown outrageously vile. *Except the Lord of Hosts had left us a very small Remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah.* Notwithstanding their abominable Crimes, they retain'd an outward Form of Religion, and, probably, imagin'd thereby to atone for their Sins: But God was so far from being pleas'd with such vain, Hypocritical Pretences, that, on the contrary, he look'd upon them as an Aggravation of their Wickedness. *Bring no more vain Ob-lations, saith the Lord; Incense is an Abomination unto me; the New-Moons and Sabbaths, the Calling of Assemblies I cannot away with; it is Iniquity, even the solemn Meeting. Your New-Moons, and your appointed Feasts, my Soul hateth: They are a Trouble unto me, I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your Hands, I will hide mine Eyes from you: Yea, when ye make many Prayers, I will not hear: Your Hands are full of Blood.* Those Acts of Religion, which are perform'd by Men of wicked Lives, are so far from being acceptable unto God, that, on the contrary, they are highly displeasing unto him.

IN the Words of my Text the *Jewish* Nation is compar'd unto a Vineyard. They were the Visible Church, the Professing People of GOD, peculiarly related to him, and bless'd with the Means of Grace and Salvation, when the rest of the World was overspread with Darkness and Idolatry: *For the Vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the House of Israel, and the Men of Judah his pleasant Plant. This Vineyard was planted in a very fruitful Hill. He fenced it, and gather'd out the Stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest Vine, and built a Tower in the Midst of it, and also made a Wine-Press therein.* It had every Advantage that could be desir'd to render it a fertile Spot of Ground; and a Tower was erected in it, to prevent the Depredations of Robbers. The Owner thereof had Reason to expect that it would have brought forth choice Grapes; but, to his great Grief and Disappointment, *it brought forth wild Grapes, sour, bitter, unwholesome Fruit.*

THE Situation of the *Jews*, with respect to the Almighty, very much resembled ours; only that our Advantages are greater, and our Privileges much higher, than theirs.

I INTEND, therefore, in the following Discourse, to point out,

I. SOME

I. SOME of those many Advantages we of this Nation have been blest'd with. *What could have been done more to my Vineyard, that I have not done in it?*

II. WHAT bad Returns we have made to the Almighty for his great and distinguishing Goodness. *Wherefore when I looked that it should bring forth Grapes, brought it forth wild Grapes?*

III. CONCLUDE with an Application of the Whole.

I. I AM to point out some of, &c.

1. WE enjoy many temporal Blessings, conferr'd upon us by the Supreme Governor of all Things. We inhabit a Country greatly enrich'd by the Bounties of Divine Providence; a Land (as the Scripture emphatically expresseth it) flowing with Milk and Honey, and producing, generally, Abundance of most of the Necessaries and Conveniencies of Life. By means of a large and extensive Trade, we are also able to import whatever is useful and valuable in other Countries of the World. We live in an Island most happily situated for Commerce, and for Defence against the Invasion of Foreign Enemies, as they can't approach us but by Sea. Our Climate also is temperate, neither scorch'd with excessive Heat,

Heat, nor pinch'd with very severe Cold, unless at some extraordinary Seasons, which seldom last long. This we should look upon as a very great Blessing. Those Countries, which are subject to either of these Extremes, must be very troublesome to live in,

2. WE have a Form of Government wisely calculated to secure us in the Possession of the above-mention'd Blessings. We are not govern'd by the arbitrary, uncontrollable Will of one Man, but by Laws fram'd with the Concurrence of Persons chosen by ourselves. Many Countries of the Globe groan under the heavy, galling Yoke of arbitrary Power. Their Lives and Properties are at the Disposal of those who *rule them with a Rod of Iron, and whose tender Mercies are cruel*; who insult and oppress them with unrelenting Rigour and Severity. They are compell'd, upon the highest Penalties, to profess a Religion which, perhaps, their Consciences abhor as corrupt and idolatrous, and have no other Choice but suffering a cruel Death. On the contrary, we are happily exempted from those tyrannical Impositions, and enjoy a mild, legal Government.

BUT, 3dly, what is by far the greatest and most important of all Blessings, we have the Light of the glorious Gospel shining upon us. We have the Scriptures (those Fountains of saying Truth) in our own Language. The Gospel

Gospel is preach'd amongst us in its native Purity, and free from Human Additions or Corruptions; and (if it be not our own Fault) we may, to our unspeakable Comfort and Advantage, experience it *the Power of God unto Salvation*. Many Nations of the World are destitute of that great Blessing. They lie in Darkness and the Shadow of Death, while we have Light in our Dwellings, and the Lamp of Sacred, Divine Knowledge to guide our Feet into the Way of Life and Peace. We need not be at a Loss how to obtain the Favour of God, and secure a blessed Immortality. It is clearly reveal'd to us in the Sacred Pages, so that *he who runs may read*. We need not now anxiously enquire, *Where-with shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the High God?* We learn from the Sacred Oracles, that *he gave his only-begotten Son to be the Propitiation for our Sins, to atone for our Guilt, and bring us near by the Blood of his Cross*. We have there also many exceeding great and precious Promises of the Divine Assistance to help our Infirmities. His Spirit will be given, and his Grace imparted, to purify our polluted Souls, if we humbly and earnestly desire it. We are not left to the Weakness of our own unassisted Nature, but may be *endu'd with Power from on high*, and conquer all the Opposition of Sin and Satan *thro' him that loveth us*. If temporal Blessings (which are confin'd to this short, uncertain Life) justly demand a thankful

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Acknowledgement from us, much more do those which have so close a Connection with our everlasting Welfare: Certainly, the Enjoyment of them challengeth the sincerest Returns of Love and Gratitude. *What could God have done more for his Vineyard, that he hath not done in it?* He hath afforded us all the Means necessary to our eternal Salvation; so that we shall be utterly without Excuse, if we fall short of it.

II. I AM to consider what Returns we have made to the Almighty for his great and distinguishing Goodness. *Wherefore when I looked that it should bring forth Grapes, brought it forth wild Grapes?* Is not this strictly applicable to us? Have we not brought forth in great Plenty the wild Grapes of Sin and Error? Deism and Infidelity make a rapid Progress among us. The Christian Religion is openly attack'd, and impiously blasphem'd, by Multitudes of deluded Wretches, who deny the Lord that bought them. There are Clubs and Societies form'd in our Metropolis, on purpose to carry on the Cause of Infidelity, and make Proselytes to their detestable Scheme. They treat our Holy Religion as a gross Imposture, and represent the Blessed Author of it as a Deceiver of Mankind. Others (*viz.* the *Arians* and *Socinians*) oppose the Divinity of our LORD JESUS, which is the essential, fundamental Article of it, and thereby strive to

rob us of all our Comfort and Hopes of Salvation from him; for, if he had not been strictly and properly GOD as well as Man, how could he have aton'd and satisfied for our Sins, and conquer'd those mighty Enemies that are leagu'd against us?

BUT, supposing Men to be never so orthodox and right in their Notions with regard to Christianity in general, or any particular Doctrines thereof, what will that avail, if our Lives are inconsistent with our sacred Profession? To pretend that we *know God*, when we deny him by our Works, will only draw upon us the greater Guilt, and expose us to the heavier Condemnation. Don't Numbers among us dishonour the Christian Character by their wicked, unchristian Lives? Does not all Manner of Vice prevail to such a Degree, as almost, like a Torrent, to carry all before it? What gross Intemperance and Excess? What Luxury and Pride, Riot and Debauchery? How often is the Marriage-Bed defil'd without Remorse or Shame? What dreadful Imprecations are made use of in Men's common Discourse? How is the sacred Name of GOD profan'd upon every trifling Occasion. Surely, it is a Sin of a very deep Dye, and calls loudly for the Divine Vengeance upon those who idly and wantonly abuse that adorable Name. Common Swearing prepares Men for wilful, deliberate Perjury. When they get a Habit of
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calling God to Witness to every Impertinence, they lose all Reverence for him, and are easily drawn to the Commission of that horrid Sin; for such it undoubtedly is. Perjury is not only a very daring Affront to the Almighty, but also exceeding pernicious to Human Society, as it tends to dissolve one of the strongest Bands which can unite Mankind. How excessively fond are many Persons of Gaming, to the Neglect, and, very often, the Ruin, of their temporal Affairs. They sacrifice the Peace of their Minds, and the Welfare of themselves and Families, to that criminal, accursed Passion. There have been sad Instances of Men who ventur'd all they possess'd in the World upon the Chance of a Card or a Die, and lost it. Upon Reflection of what they had done, they have been so stung with a Sense of their Guilt and Folly as to lay violent Hands upon themselves, and in a Fit of Distraction put an End to their wretched Lives. At best, it is Time wasted, and a precious Talent squander'd and abus'd. How deplorably is the Sabbath-Day perverted from its original Intention! We are strictly commanded to *keep it holy*, and dedicate it to the Worship of God and Religious Exercises. We are forbid to *find our own Pleasure, or to speak our own Words, on his Holy Day*. But how often is it made a Season of Pleasure and Diversion, or of Application to Worldly Business. Many Persons (who ought to set good Examples to

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others) commonly begin their Journeys, without any Necessity, on that Day, and thereby declare what little Regard they have to its Institution. There are Multitudes who seldom or never attend Divine Worship; and some, who do attend, shew very little Sense of real Piety and inward Devotion, by their indecent, trifling Behaviour. Fewer still receive the Memorials of our Blessed Lord's Sufferings exhibited in the Sacrament, tho' expressly requir'd to do it by his dying Command. They quiet their Consciences with vain Excuses, and go on from Year to Year in the Neglect of that important Duty and blessed Privilege. Others, again, are insatiably greedy after Earthly Things: They add House to House, and Field to Field, but have little or no Regard for their immortal Concerns, their everlasting Interests. How few are there who come up to the Standard of Heathen Morality, and are careful not to do to another what they would not another should do unto them, who are free from Acts of Oppression and Injustice, and constantly speak the Truth from their Hearts. There are fewer still whose Hearts and Lives are devoted to God, influenc'd and govern'd by the Spirit of Christianity; who love the Lord Jesus in Sincerity, and study to walk as he also walked; whose Affections are set upon Things above, who are crucified unto the World, and the World crucified unto them; who can testify, *the Life I live in the*

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Flesh, I live by the Faith of the Son of God.

This is the Character of every real Christian.

In vain do we pretend to be of that Number, unless we experience the Operation of Divine Grace purifying and renewing our inmost Souls, and producing a suitable Conversation.

The Temper of our Minds, and the Tenour of our Lives, must be such as the Gospel requires, if we hope for the glorious, immense Rewards it promiseth to all its sincere Professors. The great Design of Christianity is to convert our fallen, sinful Souls, and fit us for the Joys of Eternity. Where it is cordially and truly entertained in an honest and good Heart, it is productive of those blessed Effects. It fills the Soul with the purest Delights in this Life, and prepares it for the Glory and Happiness of the next.

I SHALL therefore, in the third and last Place, make an Application of the Whole.

WE are call'd upon by Authority to humble ourselves this Day before Almighty God, on account of our heinous Sins and manifold Provocations. There is great Reason to fear that, without a National Repentance and Reformation, we may be visited with some sore Judgments, and made Examples of Divine Justice. When a People are grown incurably wicked and corrupt, and have slighted the Mercies and Favours conferr'd upon them, it has been the Method of Providence

Providence, in all Ages, to inflict some severe Punishment upon such, in order to bring them to a proper Sense of their Sins, and prevent their eternal Ruin. Judgment is call'd God's strange Work, it being more pleasing to him to bless us with the Tokens of his Goodness, than scourge and chastise us: Nevertheless, the latter is sometimes necessary, in order to vindicate the Honour of his righteous Laws, which otherwise would be trampled upon, and dispose the Sinner to Amendment. We are at present engag'd in War with an Enemy that is very formidable, and greatly incens'd. What may be the Event thereof is known only unto him *who doth whatsoever pleaseth him in the Armies of Heav'n, and among the Inhabitants of the Earth.* Our Forces by Sea or Land will be but a weak Defence and Protection to us without his Almighty Aid and Favour. Commanders may be treacherous or cowardly, and betray those whom they ought to defend. We have hitherto no great Reason to boast of Success. Our Schemes have been disappointed, and our Enemies have gain'd considerable Advantages over us. A Scarcity of the Necessaries of Life has also been severely felt by the Poor of this Land. If Providence had not remarkably interposed in our Favour by a sudden Alteration of the Weather last Harvest, the Distress must have been much greater, and the Effects more fatal. If the heavy Rains had continu'd

a little longer, the Fruits of the Earth must have been absolutely destroy'd, and a Famine ensu'd. To avert so great a Calamity, it is highly necessary for us to be deeply humbled for our Sins against our Great Benefactor and Preserver, and confess them with penitent and contrite Hearts. Let us also resolve (by the Assistance of Divine Grace) to forsake our evil Ways, and turn unto the Lord, from whom we have grievously revolted. Let us not think it enough to put on a little Seriousness for a single Day, in Compliance with Authority, and then return to our former Sins and Follies. That would be only trifling with God, and deceiving our own Souls. On the contrary, may the Impression be deep and lasting, and produce a sincere Reformation and Change of Life. Let us reflect upon the Obligations we are under to love and obey our Heavenly Father, in Point of Duty, Gratitude, and Interest, temporal and eternal. He can punish us for our Sins in this World by his awful Visitations, by depriving us of the Comforts of Life, and sending the Sword or the Plague, those Ministers of his Vengeance, to destroy us: And (what is infinitely more terrible still) he can doom us to the nethermost Hell, and consign us over to everlasting Torments. We should, therefore, be afraid of offending him, and incurring his righteous Displeasure, seeing we can't fly from his Presence, or abide his Indignation. *Let us stand in Awe, and sin not.*
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More especially, let a Sense of his great Love to Mankind, manifested in such a Variety of Instances, constrain us to devote our Lives to his Honour and Glory. His Goodness is immense: We daily and hourly experience it in those many Blessings we receive from him; but it shines forth with a peculiar Lustre in the wonderful Work of our Redemption. He gave his only-begotten Son to die a Sacrifice for our Sins, and *suffer, the Just for the Unjust, that he might bring us to God.* Through Faith in his atoning Blood, and infinitely meritorious Righteousness, we may receive the Forgiveness of all our Sins and most heinous Provocations, and attain a sweet and comfortable Assurance of the Favour of God. Our Redemption by Christ is the highest possible Instance of the Divine Compassion and Regard to sinful Creatures. May we not only yield our Assent to that *faithful Saying, and worthy of all Acceptation,* but also find our Hearts inflam'd with Love and Gratitude to the Almighty for his inestimable Grace. Love is the most noble and generous Principle of Obedience. It will enable us to perform the most difficult Duties, and most painful to Flesh and Blood. Since he has been graciously pleas'd to give us such incontestable Proofs of his Goodwill, let us not be so wicked, so monstrously ungrateful, as wilfully to persist in a State of Sin and Rebellion, and make him our Enemy. May we be deeply sensible of our past Trans-

gressions,

gressions, our Abuse of his great Goodness, and humbly ask Forgiveness for the Sake of our Blessed Redeemer and Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous. Let us, above all Things, be solicitous to get an Interest in his Merits and Propitiation, that our Souls may be eternally happy. Let us disclaim all Hope of Salvation for the sake of any Works or Righteousness of our own, and accept of it, with all Humility and Thankfulness, as the unmerited Gift of God, and the Purchase of our Lord's bitter Sufferings. In strict Justice we deserve everlasting Misery on account of original and actual Transgression, committed against the clearest Light, and the most engaging Motives to a contrary Conduct; and there is no other Way of escaping that dreadful Doom, but by a timely and sincere Application to the Son of God, who has answer'd all the Demands of Divine Justice, made full Satisfaction for all our Offences against the Majesty of Heaven, and obtain'd Mercy and Salvation for penitent, Self-condemn'd Sinners, who come unto him by a lively Faith. We have to do with a God of infinite Mercy and boundless Compassion, who willeth not the Ruin and Destruction of his Creatures, but rather their Happiness and Salvation: Yet he will by no means *clear the guilty*, or extend his saving Mercy to obstinate, impenitent Transgressors, who go on in their evil Ways, Such have nothing to look for

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for but the most dreadful and aggravated Misery in a future State. *Hear ye the Rod then, and who hath appointed it.* God speaks to us by his Judgments, and by the small, still Voice of his Spirit. Let us not slight his warning Voice, or harden our Hearts against his gracious Calls; but with penitential Sorrow, and unfeign'd Humility, acknowledge our Sins and Unworthiness, and implore his forgiving Mercy. Let us also pray for the Welfare and Prosperity of our Country, that Piety may lift up its languid, declining Head; that real Christianity may shine forth in our Lives and Conversations; and that we may no longer disgrace the best Religion, by committing such Crimes as an honest Heathen would blush at. Let us pray that *our Candlestick be not remov'd, and the Kingdom of Heaven taken from us, and given to a Nation bringing forth the Fruits thereof.* This has been the Case with many famous Churches and Countries. When the Means of Grace and Salvation are ungratefully abus'd, those precious Jewels are taken from such as only trample them under their Feet, and have no Sense of their surpassing Worth and Excellence. May we then live as *Children of the Light and of the Day, and no longer have Fellowship with the unfruitful Works of Darknes.* It will be our Wisdom so to act if we regard only the Peace and Comfort of this present Life; but much more, if we

take Eternity into our Account, and consider the fatal Consequence of a mispent Life. Our Behaviour in this World will influence our everlasting State, since every one of us must appear before the Judgment-Seat of Christ, and receive for the Things done in the Body, according to what we have done, whether Good or Evil. We shall stand at his awful Bar, and be sentenc'd by him to endless Joy or Misery. What infinite Reason have we to get our Souls prepar'd for that unutterably important Day, the Terrors of which will make the stoutest Sinner tremble, if found out of Christ, and destitute of a Part in his precious Atonement. *O that Men were wise then, that they understood this, and consider'd their latter End!* The worst of Sinners may now (by the Grace of God) find Mercy; but if they reject the Offers of Divine Love, and go on to provoke him, they will certainly be overwhelm'd with everlasting Shame and Sorrow. May the Prospect of Glory, Honour, and Immortality, promis'd to the Righteous, engage us to a *patient Continuance in Well-doing*, and the Dread of endless Misery restrain us from presumptuous Sin and wilful Wickedness. May we improve this short, uncertain Life to the noblest Purposes, the Glory of God, and the securing a blessed Eternity. There we shall be fix'd beyond the Reach of Sin or Pain. *All Tears will be wip'd away from*

our Eyes, and GOD himself be our everlasting Portion, and exceeding great Reward. Nothing can make us amends for the Loss of that Happiness. The Pleasures of Sin are but for a Season, and the Delights of this World will quickly vanish away, and come to a perpetual End. May we aspire after what is more durable and solid, and not forego our Hope of it for the sake of any Enjoyment here below. Nothing is so comfortable and refreshing in this World as a lively Expectation of that amazing Happiness. It tends greatly to alleviate the Miseries of Human Life, and support us in the most afflicted State.

Lastly, LET us send up our fervent Prayers to the Throne of Grace, that the Calamities of War and Bloodshed may give Place to a settled Peace and Tranquility; *that Nation may no longer rise against Nation, or Kingdom against Kingdom; that their Swords may be turned into Plough-shares, and their Spears into Pruning-hooks; and that every Man may sit under his own Vine, and under his own Fig-tree,* undisturb'd by the Terrors and Alarums of War. It is an Evil that must be submitted to, and indeed is unavoidable in the present State of the World, while Men's unruly Lusts and Passions tyrannize over them, and Pride and Ambition are the governing Principles. We should pray that the Almighty

may direct our Councils, and teach our Senators Wisdom; that he may give the desir'd Success to his Majesty's Arms by Sea and Land; that our Commanders may distinguish themselves by their Courage and Conduct, and discharge the important Trust committed unto them with Faithfulness and Diligence. Let us especially look up to God for his Blessing upon our Undertakings, and not trust in an Arm of Flesh, or rely upon Human Strength or Policy, lest by fatal Experience we find it to be a broken Reed. We should earnestly wish that the Fear of God, and a Regard to his holy Name, may influence our Fleets and Armies, and that Irreligion and Profaneness may no longer prevail among them to the Dishonour of the Almighty, and the Grief and Scandal of all good Men: Then we may reasonably hope that the Designs of our Enemies will be frustrated, their Enterprizes prove abortive, and the Blessings we enjoy continu'd and perpetuated to this Land. We have hitherto been wonderfully preserved, and rescu'd from the open Attacks, and secret Plots concerted for the depriving us of those Privileges, with which the good Providence of God has favour'd us. We should take Care not to forfeit his Protection by our Sins; but implore his Pity and Patience to be longer exercised towards us. May we all, from the Highest to the Lowest, humble ourselves under his mighty

mighty Hand, acknowledge and bewail our manifold and heinous Provocations, and be determin'd (by his Grace) for the Time to come, to renounce and cast off those Works of Iniquity, which are so offensive to his glorious Eyes, and will end in the eternal Ruin of those who persist in them, and madly defy Almighty Vengeance. A Sense of the Favour of God is the highest Blessing, and the sweetest Cordial in this Life, and *more to be desir'd than Gold, yea, than much fine Gold.* May we covet it above all other Things, and seek it with unwearied Diligence. Let us not foolishly prefer every Trifle to that *Pearl of great Price.* May we humbly claim it in the Name of Christ, through whom alone Sinners can be accepted of God, justified in this Life, and sav'd eternally in the next.

As there will be a Collection for the Poor, I hope all, who are able, will contribute to their Relief in this Time of Distress, when the Necessaries of Life bear so high a Price. This Duty is strongly requir'd, and enforc'd upon us by Motives of Compassion and Ties of Humanity, as well as the express and positive Commands of Almighty God, and the Example of our Redeemer, *who in the Days of his Flesh went about doing Good,* and was constantly exercis'd in Acts of the greatest Beneficence to the Souls and Bodies of Men. *Let us also go and do likewise* according to our Power.

Power, and we shall in no wise lose our Reward. We shall find the blessed Effects of it, perhaps, in this World, and most certainly at the Resurrection of the Just, when the Judge of Quick and Dead will reckon what was done to the least of his Members, as done to himself.

*NOW to the King Eternal, Immortal,
Invisible, the only Wise GOD, be
Honour and Glory, Love and Obedience,
for ever and ever, Amen.*

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